DREAMS, STRUGGLES, AND GIFTS

I wonder how I can endure the terribleness of living day to day without knowing how she is. There are times I become afraid that if I lose my memory, I will lose her forever.

I picture two points resting on the horizon. I am one of the points. The other point becomes shape, organic. Several projections, extending from a larger mass, slowly take human form. This human shape moves towards me. One moment she is as tall as this capital letter I; the next, she is larger than my eye. I wonder, will she do me injury?

She comes towards me. She is smiling. As she walks past me, she says, "Goodbye." I wave and say goodbye too, then take the path she has left behind. I wonder at what point the woman who is becoming smaller and smaller behind me, will disappear altogether? Will it be when I can no longer remember what she looks like or the way she speaks?

Perhaps we are fortunate to have had other leave-takings, I tell myself. Perhaps our goodbyes, along with all the other goodbyes I have suffered, can teach me how to embrace myself more fully, especially the parts that can make me feel strong. Then I will find a way to cope with this situation.

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I leave New York City, and for the next two and a half years I travel and live in New England. For a short time I live with Dove and then alone. I work very hard to find my own center again or more accurately a new center. Sometimes I am connected to womens' collectives and other times I live alone. My visions and dreams become my teachers.

I see a fierce Mohawk woman sitting cross-legged on the ground. She plays a drum and makes sounds. She sings of wanting to be a bird flying, a tree holding earth and sky together. In the midst of a small town in the midst of congregations of WASPs in the midst of Ohio in the midst of America she sings herself into a solid shape. Her ancestors from Pennsylvania, Canada, England, France, Germany, make a circle about her. Some of them are disturbed by her singing.

I draw on this Indian blood from my father's mother. She died when he was seven. Why did they not give me her name, Maria, as they gave my sister our mother's mother's name? The name Judith is used by both Christians and Jews. In Hebrew it means Jew. By giving me this name, my parents unwittingly expanded their tribal boundaries. They have not wanted me to go where this name has taken me.

Mari used to tell me that sometimes when she'd call out my name it would stick in her throat like a tickle she couldn't get rid of. But when I close my eyes and say her name—Mari, Mariposa, Mari Mother, she comes to me.

She circles above me. Sky Goddess, dragon, horse, chariot, bird are one. They are Mari.

She sails towards me as I stand alone in the center of a meadow. I have been waiting for her. Her look is angry so I ask her what has upset her so.

Without a word she takes up her reins and moves on and up, becoming clouds again. I pick up a butterfly net and try to catch the clouds, but they slip easily through the netting and their shapes escape me. I will wonder and wait for her to come again to me in a vision.

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Dream—South Hadley, Massachusetts.

It is very hot and I can't open the windows in the front of the apartment where I am staying because the exhaust from a steady stream of passing cars would enter the room.

I rest in the kitchen where a small window is open.

The bed is here for it is the quietest and coolest room in the house. I'm having trouble concentrating.

Cries of children hit the window like pebbles. I want to relax by playing on the marimba. But I can't get off the bed.

The door bell rings. I manage to drag myself out of the apartment and into the hallway. I notice that the hall and steps are a bright red color. Then I remember I had painted them to cheer myself up the week before.

I try to open the front door but it's locked or stuck.

I rise up on tiptoes to look through a small, dirty window, but no one is there.

Then I notice the corner of a letter jutting through the mail slot of the door. I pull at it without being able to move it. I can barely grasp it with my fingers.

I shout to whomever might be holding the letter on the other side of the door to let it go. But there is no response. So I kick at the door, trying to open it.

When the frustration becomes unbearable, I break out sobbing.

As tears flow down my cheeks, the letter slips easily by itself through the slot and falls to the floor.

I pick it up and see it is from Mari.

When Mari does come to me again in a vision I see her in profile. She has on her Guatemalan blouse embroidered with many colors. Her huipil. As I look, her chin begins to recede and disappear. Her two eyes, two moons, become two creatures. They approach me. I do not know them. Their appearance astonishes me. Rare, ancient, mysterious objects, tremendous energy and light emanting from their centers. Quazars.

When the two creatures smile at me, I feel my whole body smile with them. They wear colorful gowns and silver wheels beneath their feet. They beckon me to join them. I want to, but I am afraid. I know without seeing them naked that they are hermaphrodites. Yet I know their essential selves to be female. By that I mean their intelligence, their sensibility and their language is one I can perceive as being close to mine. The experiences molded in our bodies are familiar. Of course, I have invented them.

They aren't articulate with words. They don't need to explain themselves. I don't ask them to. Their presences speak clearly, openly. Words will only prevent our connection. Since nothing is hidden, I do not have to ask them questions.

They are a hermaphrodite duo, a twin amalgamation of both sexes, beckoning me to go with them, and I am afraid. They still seem to be rolling on their liquid rolling wheels, trembling for a moment near me. They know exactly who I am. I will not go with them and leave myself. I cannot. Yet their invitation will lead me through the journey of transfiguring essential parts of myself. I will find them in me.

I will be them. Both of them. I will be mother and father, Constance and Matthew, Meredith and Judith, Josh and Judith. I will be Mari and Judith. I will be the twins, two, two I's, two eyes. I will be two in one, two eyes in one face.

I dream of her eyes again, seeking assurance from them, but they are transfixed by their own need. I understand that it is the need not to be distinguished from star, from plant, from animal. When I catch a glimpse of her again, appearing to stand human on the grass at the corner of La Rue de la Rosa and La Rue de la Orchidea, waiting for her picture to be taken, she can't hold the pose long. Thought moves her on to discover what is at the following street corner. She crawls away from me, a chameleon, and begins circling me with her changing colors.

The Sky Goddess circles once more and comes down to me. This time language accompanies her mask of anger.

"I am angry with you because you do not play with the sky animals," she says.

"What do you mean?" I ask her, perplexed and then amused. "Everyone knows there are no sky animals. There are only the animals that live here with me on the ground, like the lions and the birds." I disappear into my laughter, my skepticism and when I look up again she is gone.

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Dream—Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Two women from Argentina are sitting at a rusty kitchen table with me. They seem to be withholding information. They

are dressed like myself in blue jeans and cotton shirts.

I ask them many questions about the area where Mari lives near Buenos Aires. They look at each other often and raise their eyebrows suspiciously. I ask, "What is it like there? Is it safe? Can you get to the city easily?"

The stouter woman with a butch hair cut nods abruptly, "yes." Then her companion echoes the nod. They don't smile.

"Is it a place where other lesbians live too? And artist-type people?"

Again the first nods and the second follows.

"She can't write to me anything too specific about what she is doing. So her letters all sound like poems to me. I'm getting very frustrated. I thought you could tell me what it's like there by the river where she lives."

I didn't want to tell them too much either. What if they were agents for the military? What if in fact they were seeking information about her activities in this country? From me?

The two women soften towards me. They relax and smile. The one with curly black hair and white, bone-like skin talks brokenly. "Everyone lives there hidden, in run-down little cottages. It's a ghetto for homosexuals, like us. And they have to be very quiet and keep to themselves."

"What is your friend's name," the androgynous woman asks.

"Mari," I reply. "Do you know her?"

They both shake their heads, no. "We don't know her,"

I cannot forget that Mari has told me she is angry that I do not play with the sky animals. For weeks I try to understand the message in this vision as I go about my daily tasks. Then one day as I am gazing into the vast roof of blue sky, I have an insight: My sky animals are the clouds always in transformation. Like chameleons, they change with their shapes and feed the imagination.

In my vision, Mari became Sky Goddess and told me that I did not play enough with the sky animals, the cloud forms of my own imagination. She seemed to say that if I played more with my fancy, I could find her in myself and ease the loneliness of

our separation. My dream told me that what I thought was loneliness for Mari was also a loneliness for a far away part of myself, that I had projected upon her, a part that I must now reclaim. How long will it take me to understand my own insight, I wonder

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Dream—New York City.

Where do I come from? As I think the question, I become aware of my surroundings. It is a very bright moonlit night, brighter than I have ever experienced night to be.

There are a few stark fir trees about me. I look down at the ground and see that it's porous, but hard like lava.

Energy seems to be emanating from the surface. I find I can jump very high into the air and float back to the ground.

As I think again to myself—Where do I come from?—my attention is pulled to the sky. Through the black branches of a tree, I see a bright, full moon. I think, How perfect it is. Then my glance moves on to the right where I see a second, equally bright, but slightly smaller moon.

"I am from the land of the two moons," I say.

Then a face glows out of the first moon. The face is that of a woman. It looks like Mari's face to me.

I hear a voice say, "It is Mari's face; but also the face of Diana."

In my dreams I try to go to Mari in Argentina. Sometimes Argentina is just beyond Paris and the plane officials refuse to fly me there. Sometimes Argentina is in hidden areas of this country that I am somewhat familiar with. In one dream it is on an island south of the Carolinas. But when I look for her there after days of walking on long roads in the hot sun, neighbors tell me she has left. 'She is traveling,' they say, 'around the world.'

Once I dream I find her in an old Spanish church. I still remember the spectacular stained glass windows. I think—This is where I ought to find Mari, surrounded by rich colors and light. When I approach the woman kneeling and praying in the church, who I think is Mari, a face of a stranger turns towards me. She gives me the same imploring, frightened look that Mari gave me

in the airport. There is no joy in her eyes.

Other dreams I have are infiltrated by falling orange leaves. Orange leaves fascinated Mari. In one dream they make a path to a small house. I count the leaves, as one counts the days before expecting the arrival of a loved one, while walking towards this house. I believe Mari is there.

When I near the small wooden cabin it changes into a simple pine box. Inside the box is snow and decayed brown leaves.

I awake from the dream with a strange taste in my mouth. Is the taste of her on my tongue? Or is it the taste of those persistent orange leaves now rotten from cold and the absence of a life source?

I cling to the few letters I do receive from her and the odd mementos she has left behind. A satin-covered music box that pictures a young girl sitting at the feet of an older woman who is playing the guitar becomes an icon as valuable to me as the cross is to others. Mari had given it to me, then asked me to teach her some of my songs.

Other odd objects that had attracted her but could not be taken back with her remain on my shelves: a carved perfume bottle from China, sandals she'd worn through Central America with soles made from rubber tires, letters from many acquaintances she'd made in her travels and a worn-out doll, half animal and half child, from her childhood. This doll, whom I would call Zorra after one of the characters in her writing, had protected her during her journeys and now the doll would serve as the spirit of Mari for me. Mari whom I adored. Mari who adored me. Mari who always appeared when I needed her. Mari with small, finely modeled feet had now become wedded to my dreams.

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Dream—New York City.

I have been flying all night. At times I soar above the trees in a relaxed, exhilarating manner. At other times I struggle to lift myself above the tree tops. When dawn comes I land in a small village. I walk through the village of small, wooden shops into thick, lush woods. Within the woods I find a clearing where a

small group of women are busy building simple wooden huts. I almost feel that they are expecting me. They are naked and I am aware of the fact that I can't see their vaginas because they are folded within their bodies.

One woman carves out the inside of a huge wooden log. Her movements are energetic and graceful. As I watch her, she places bones and shells in the large hollow place in the log. She turns to me then and tells me in a mellow voice that she is calling for the tree spirit. As I watch her open her mouth and sing I see for the first time that she is Mari. But she is some aspect of Mari that I have never seen before—the Mari that is completely her own person and thus out of my reach.

As I continue on my walk, past her, I place an apple I retrieve from my pocket in the hollow of her log. Her face is senuous and open. I imagine her tongue entering me and giving me pleasure. As if she has guessed my thoughts she touches my arm lightly and asks if I would like to join her and the other women in a ritual. I nod enthusiastically. We gather in a grove of pine trees emitting the heavy, pungent smell of resin. The carver motions for us to gather in a circle and she begins to talk to us. She informs us that we will do a ritual of tongues, which will aid us in our process of learning to speak a common language.

A sleek doe races by us, adding a rhythm of crackling, branch sounds to our teacher's voice. We laugh and a bluejay imitates our laughter. I feel so connected to these women now.

We are instructed to form a circle around four women in the center who are to beat on a large red drum which has conveniently appeared. It looks like the caja chayera Mari sent me a few years before.

"With our arms around each others' shoulders, let us slowly, in unison, move toward the drummers led by our tongues." The comforting voice of our leader moves into me like a warm current. We thrust our tongues towards the drumming women and begin to move towards each other slowly.

My dream fades as the circle of women enfold like petals of a flower around the red drum and the four drummers. I fall then into a very restful sleep.

I could say I quilted a relationship from the materials of our love: our shared moments, her letters, my dreams and visions. The times we clung, the times we tugged, pulled, burst out lively, green, growing were etched in the quilt in brilliant colors. Our separations made up the darker backgrounds of the quilt, serving to enhance the images of our connections all the more. I wrap myself in this quilt and in making love to myself, I make love to Mari. Fantasy fruit is very beautiful and serves well to stimulate the senses in the absence of our lovers. But is it my needs or Mari's look, that imploring look she gave me in the airport, that look which says 'hold me to your life,' which welds me to her?

I cannot let Mari go. I cannot let the fruit of our love drop from the vine. If I let her go, if I were to connect to another, *Mari will be harmed. Mari will die. Mari is living in an extremely dangerous situation.* My dreaming, wanting, thinking Mari not only keeps her close to me but keeps her alive and protected. I believe she has asked me with this look to do so for her and that is what I do. Out of anxiety and uncertainty and out of caring I construct something solid, real and knowable. With me she will be safe.

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Bzzz, bzzz, bzzz.

The fly is out to drive me mad. I know it. Why can't I move my arms to stop it? It wants to invade me. I must cover my ears. Where are they? It knows my thoughts. Round and round my head it goes. I can't stand it touching my hair. This tickling torture is death.

Bzzz, Bzzz, Bzzz.

Help! I can't take this anymore. Help!

"What do you want from me?" My voice explodes me awake from a stiffling, afternoon nap. I'm in my studio on Fifth Avenue. It's summer. There is no fly. The buzzer on my intercom is crying into the thick heat.

Oh my God, someone's downstairs.

I pull on the cotton shirt thrown off carelessly in my sleep. "I'm coming. Hold your horses!" My finger finds a black button

on the plastic box beside the door.

The box starts to speak. "Where are you, Judith?"

"Hello? Hello?" I say. "Hello!"

"Judith, where were you? It's me. I've been standing here for twenty minutes shouting into this thing. Didn't you hear me? Hurry up. I've got to go to the bathroom."

"Who are you? You sound just like my sister."

"It is your sister. Let me in."

I push all the buttons at once.

"Meredith, what in Sam Hill are you doing here?" I shout.

She does not respond.

My god, Meredith, my twin sister, is climbing up the eighty-eight steps to my studio.

I find some pants to put on, then run to the bathroom to splash water on my face and run a comb through my hair. When I give the room a hasty once over to see if there is some semblance of order I think, 'Oh Jesus, she won't like it.' But it's too late. She'll have to take it as it is.

At the stair landing outside my door I look down on a small figure pulling itself up the endless grey steps.

"You're almost here. Keep going," I call out.

She looks up at me. I have familiar feelings that are still strange. Am I seeing someone I might have been had one gamete burst into my egg rather than hers? Can I still remember back in my brain cells to the time when those first momentous chemical decisions took place? Though we are not replicas, we share many of the same genes. We are extensions, variations on themes.

Once we were two little birds each in our own egg, who shared the same warm nest. How were we about sharing then? Did I take up my half of the space or did I curl into myself so as to not offend her? Or did I stretch this way and that, pushing my sac against hers? And did she tighten herself against me?

We came out of the same dark womb to suckle the same wet breasts. I wonder did we ever bump and bite each other, vying for the same nipple? Did we cuff and spit for rattles and shak-

ers? Did I sometimes suck her thumb, thinking it was mine?

How did we learn boundaries when we always shared a room, a closet, a mirror, a large oak dresser, divided in half with identical drawers on either side. We each had our own twin bed but with the same satin spreads. Her toothbrush, shaped like mine, was always yellow, the blue one was mine. Her pajamas had the flowers; the striped ones were mine. We each wanted the other to have what we had; yet, we each wanted our own things.

Would I feel differently if we had been raised as sisters, not as twins?

She is not a lover who is returning, though I have *known* her as with all members of my first commune, my blood family, in deep unconscious dreams. And in times of unrest, all my lovers, male and female alike, have had to endure hearing me call them by her name.

When she slips into my room, my cells again, will the I that I think is I be shaken? Or will I ease into some peace as I look upon her, my own? Will I know again that though I have no child, I am not alone? She will not attract and pull me as a lover does for there is no conscious desire to become one; we have already been joined. The tension between us comes from our lifelong dance that tests and tries how close, how far, do we want to now become.

Oh see us dance back to the small white house on Westover Street with the long red steps where we first felt the joy of hot afternoons. Oh hear us on long sleepless nights telling silly stories about everyone we know. We speak English; we don't have a secret tongue. Oh smile at us as you would at any paired animals groping about with our four eyes, our two noses, two mouths, our eight limbs. We are sister twins! Forever and ever, until death do us part. Amen.

There is this person standing in the doorway looking as though she owns me. "I thought you'd never answer," she says. She does not embrace me.

"Why are you here? You live in California."

"Can't people from California come to New York? I told you

one of these years...."

"I know but...."

"Where's the bathroom?" She goes where I point her, leaving me alone with my new, old identity: *one of the twins.*

When Meredith comes out of the bathroom, we stare at each other mutely for some time, checking each other out. She has bright red lips and purple eye shadow; I must look pale in comparison. Her dark hair in soft curls around her face, looks too perfect—I hate to say it, like a wig. Her big brown eyes still have that frank, friendly look I hardly ever see in the city any more. Her face though seems drawn, worried. She's still a little taller, a little thinner than me.

She starts to rock on her feet. I feel my own body shaking.

"What's the matter, Judith? Why are you laughing?"

"I'm not laughing, you are." I realize both our bodies are shaking with laughter or muffled sobs. I can't tell which. Tears are rolling down my cheeks.

A magnetic force neither of us understands whips us together, face to face. We embrace.

"God, it's so funny," I say. "You're so different than me. You've become another person again."

"What does that mean? I am another person. Who did you want me to be? You?" She has retrieved a kleenex from her smart leather shoulder bag and is dabbing her eyes and nose.

"Well, so how do I look?" she asks.

"Like my sister," I answer. "Let's relax, Meredith. After all, it has been a while since I saw you last. Right?"

"This time it's been three years, six months and ten days to be exact. That was at father's seventy-fifth birthday celebration. Are you still growing cabbages? That was a riot, bringing your own home-grown vegetables like they were gold."

"I remember you got a kick out of that. I miss not having a garden. But, why are you here? I'm in shock; you should have told me you were coming."

"Rico and I are on a little vacation. We're staying at St. Moritz —rooms overlooking the park."

"Well, la-de-da."

"So how's Josh? Do you two ever see each other?"

"Once in a while. He lives uptown on the Upper West Side on Riverside Drive."

"Oh, fancy, huh? He must be selling his writing."

"He's doing okay."

"Judith, can I ask you something?"

"I guess so. Is this an interview?"

"Is Josh's family wealthy?"

"In some ways, but not the way you mean."

"I mean money-wise."

"No, hardly. He's a native of Bensonhurst; that's a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn. His father drove a cab for fifty years; his mother worked as a caterer."

"He always seemed so relaxed about money, so free with it."

"That's just part of his nature—to be generous."

"It's funny. I thought all New York Jewish people were rich. I wonder where I got that idea?"

"Maybe you got it from Centerville, Ohio. I mean, we didn't exactly get a complete and accurate picture of the world would you say from living there?"

"I didn't know Italians from Norwegians from living there."

"I know, but we sure learned who the Jewish families in town were and the blacks were kept out of town."

"That's true. I forgot to tell that to Sal. Oh, I wish I wasn't so pooped." She sighs heavily. "Why don't they have an elevator in this building?"

"I've often wondered that myself." The flat, open, ingenuous tone in her voice is so familiar. It's the mid-west sound. She looks as honest as the day is long as we would say. My roots are in the room with me, though I must admit she looks a bit uprooted here. Her white summer dress seems too clean, too pressed, like finding a nurse's uniform on sale in Macy's basement. Her eyes scan the room with a curious yet critical glint.

"What are you looking for, Meredith?" My voice sounds suspicious, tightly wrapped around old hurts. That woman in front of me has insulted me so many times, by not accepting me and my choices. I won't let her hurt me this time.

"I can't believe it," she says. She sounds almost giddy, girlish, like a girl starched into a woman's body. Or is it like a woman held by a girl's innocence? I can't help the rise of tender feelings towards her along with immense hurt .

"What, Meredith? Tell me."

"You've got some furniture."

I look around the room with her. The couch, the hand-made desk, the telephone cable spool which serves as dining room table, the chairs, all seem too exposed, too nude under her gaze. Even my bird mask over the fireplace is affected by her glance. Its usual stunning aura has almost an apologetic shade. The eyes arch now like unanswered questions.

"Did you finally decide to become civilized like the rest of us?"

She just threw cold water on my face, that's what she did. I consider sticking my tongue out at her.

"Oh, this chair is beautiful. Where did you get it?"

She is ogling my white wicker chair with the blue cushions.

"I found it on the street and I painted it and made the cushions. Do you like it?"

"It's darling. Can I sit in it?"

"If you want to have a fantasy you can. It's my dream chair."

The chair gets a once over before she places herself neatly into it. I watch her close her eyes, probably tying up neat little packages of thoughts.

"Be my guest," I say as an afterthought.

"Do you have something cold to drink?" Her sweet, almost coy voice bubbles up in little blue clouds from the chair.

"I've got some apple juice and some seltzer."

"Do you have any white wine, from California of course."

"Wait a minute, I think I do."

Good, she wants this to be a friendly get together. Wine will mellow us out a bit.

"Great, here's a half bottle of Almaden Chablis. How about if I mix half wine and half seltzer?" She nods okay and I make two tall drinks.

"Um," she says, taking one of the glasses and kicking off

black patent leather sandals. "Could we turn the fan on?"

"Do you mean, could I turn the fan on? Sure, anything else, Sis, before I sit down?"

"Don't worry," she says with a mother's caring tone, "I wait on you when you come to my house, remember?"

As I sit down on the couch near her, she flashes me a smile and a wink with the assured air of an older sister.

"Um," she says, "this tastes so good. I'm glad you were at home. Did you know your number's not listed? I couldn't call you."

"Oh, that's right. They disconnected my phone last spring. I got a new number. Didn't I send it to you?"

"No, you didn't. But it's okay. I'm used to not knowing where you are by now."

"I'm sorry, Meredith."

"No, you're not. But forget it. Oh, my legs hurt from that walk up."

"Rub the calf muscles, that helps."

"I'm getting old," she says, drawing her legs underneath her. "I was trying to describe the neighborhood on Westover Street to Sal. He had to write a paper on his roots. Let's see, who were our neighbors now? We had the McKinneys across the street; they were Irish. Remember their dog we used to call Nosey? And let's see, the Holtz family was next to us on the right. German, but French German. They were kind of strange. And there was Michael Jones and his Mom and Dad on the left of us - he was always looking into our bedroom window. I guess they were English. There was a real mixture of cultures right in our neighborhood, but who talked about it. All that seemed important was what job the man in the household had at the Burroughs Plastic Company. It's like people didn't enjoy each other that much. What a shame."

"I didn't know you felt that too, Meredith. God, do we have a lot to talk about."

"Oh, before I forget, I want to show you what I brought you for your birthday. See I didn't forget this time."

She reaches for her purse.

I'm not going to apologize for not having something for her. How many years in a row did I send her either something I'd made or something beautiful for her house? I must admit, she always sent me a thank you note.

"Here, open it up."

She hands me a beautifully wrapped box, the size that earrings or rings come in.

"It's okay, you can rip the paper, Judith."

"But, its so beautiful."

"There's more where that came from. Go on."

I'm forced to rip the gold paper smothered in dainty blue forget-me-nots. I lift off the cover of the box enclosed; it's small, red with the feel of velvet.

"Do you like them?"

Inside are two green jade earrings which look like tiny monarch butterflies. "I can't believe this, Meredith. Gorgeous butterflies!"

"Those aren't butterflies, Silly. Those are bows. As in buttons and bows. Aren't they darling?"

"Yes, really, Meredith, they are cute. Thanks, that was sweet of you. Of course, they're bows. I think I have butterflies on the brain."

"I can see how you'd get butterflies on the brain, isolating yourself on this barren mountaintop. I think I would die living alone up here."

I don't know whether to laugh or cry at this comment. I wish I had more wine in the fridge.

"You must miss nature, Judith. I feel sorry for city people, being cut off like that from the land."

"I've seen the most fantastic butterflies you could imagine or I should say, 'that I could imagine,' right here in this room."

"Wouldn't you rather see real ones?"

"I've seen other real things that look like butterflies in this room."

"Yah, like the earrings I gave you?"

"Okay, like the earrings you gave me." She needs to not get what I'm talking about. "You're right, I'd rather see real butter-

flies than imaginary ones if I had my choice. We can't live on imagination alone."

"I know what I'm going to do. Next birthday, I'm going to give you some butterfly earrings, if you promise to go where there are real butterflies to keep you company. Is that a deal?"

"I know you're concerned about me, Meredith. But sometimes artists have to isolate themself from the very thing they need, in order to understand it better."

"Well, I wouldn't want to do that."

"So you're lucky you found a nice small town to live in near L. A. I appreciate your concern, really. Anyway, where did you get the earrings?"

"I got them at Gumps. You can wear them to work. You are working now aren't you?"

"As a matter of fact I'm doing typesetting on night shifts and weekends so I can take some extra vacation at the end of the summer or in September. Maybe do some gigs out of the city then. The city is driving me nuts again."

"That reminds me. Where's *our* marimba? I want to look at it."

"It's in those black cases by the window. I haven't unpacked it from my last gig."

"Oh, nuts, I wanted to see it."

"I could unpack it, if you want. It'll just take a few minutes."

"Oh forget it. I only have an hour before I have to get back uptown. Rico's conference ends at five o'clock and then we're meeting old friends for dinner and the theater."

"I'd like to send you a tape of my last concert. Would you be interested to hear it?"

"I bet the boys would like to listen to it."

"I'm asking if *you'd* like to hear it?"

She moves her head in a non-commital way that could mean either yes or no.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"It was a spur of the moment kind of thing. You always tell me to be spontaneous."

"What are you seeing?"

"*A Chorus Line.* I'm so excited. We've been wanting to see it since it opened. "

"I wish you had told me when you were coming. There's a terrific musical at the Judson Church. It's a take off on the Joan of Arc story, but it's a modern day feminist version with great music."

"That's okay, Rico wanted to see *Chorus Line.* This trip is for him."

"Oh." Why do I still hope that Meredith will have interest in the same things I'm interested in? I should ask her if she ever got into a women's consciousness raising group. Then she'd ask me if I ever did and then I could tell her something about the women's music network.

"Judith, I'm talking to you! You never really want to know about him."

"Who, Rico? How is he doing these days."

"Do you really want to know, or are you just being polite?"

"Meredith, I think we both could improve on at least pretending we wanted to know more about each other's life. I've learned a whole lot about the art of keeping boundaries and yet being interested in the other person. Boy, do twins have problems in that area. Let's not judge each other any more. I had enough of people crawling into my mind and leaving me with their psychic fleas. Did I ever tell you about this twin I got to..."

"I don't know what you're talking about. I just wanted to tell you about Rico. Can you listen or not?"

I watch her set her glass down and clasp her hands, as if they need each other, as if doing so makes her feel more composed, whole. I know the gesture; its exactly what I do when I feel particularly upset. My hands also find each other now. She seems to bend in on herself as well, moving inward for fetal protection. I stretch myself up tall on the couch, determined not to ape her every move.

"I think there's something wrong with him. But it isn't physical. He's had all kinds of tests. They can't find anything."

"What do you mean? What's wrong with him?"

"He's depressed. All the time. Nothing excites him. Not even

me and I like to be wanted."

"I know what you mean."

"Except he's proud of the boys once in a while."

"Where's he working these days?"

"He's still with that medical consulting firm I think I told you about that. But mainly it seems like he's given up. He just says how everybody's fucking up the earth, destroying everything. He's obsessed with all the pollution around L.A. We're out of the city so we don't get it so bad."

"That must be rough. Maybe he needs an anti-depressant. They really do help people who are chronically depressed. But I know how he feels. Our environment is being terribly fucked up."

"That's just it. He won't see a psychiatrist. He won't really admit to himself that he has a problem. He says, what do I want from him. He does his work. He takes care of the yard. At least now he is bringing in half the money. If he wants to watch the TV and complain what's to stop him, he says. Sometimes I think I should just stop worrying about him and deal with my problems. "How are you, Meredith?"

"God, Judith, don't sound so serious, I'm not dying. It's okay. Something's changing in my life. Maybe because the boys are older. Mario's in his senior year in college. And Sal is going to UCLA this fall. And I won't be a Mom any more." She chokes back tears on the word *Mom.*

"Oh, Meredith, poor baby." I move instinctively towards her, fumbling to either pat her head or put my arm around her shoulders. But before I can comfort her, her thin body stiffens. If she had screamed, "Don't touch me," I could not have felt more rejected.

"I think it's a good thing you live on one coast and I live on the other. That gives us a lot of room to be ourselves," I say stiffly.

"Just don't call me baby, Judith."

"God, Meredith, I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything by that. I was just being affectionate. I feel for you. I really do."

"You should. I'm your sister. Just listen to me. That's all."

"Okay, okay. That's what I'm doing."

"I know you've gone through a lot of changes. Separating from Josh and all."

"Do you need some more to drink?"

"Just a little bit more. Where is it? Let me get it this time."

"Okay. Look in the door of the ice box. Everything you need is there."

"*Ice box*? I can tell where you come from."

"Sure, Centerville, the center of the world, where reality is prescribed by neat little rules and the actual experience of life is suspect. Can you find everything?" I have to contain myself to not call out directions to her. I immediately understand why mothers boss others so much in their kitchens. They really want to say, ' Stay out of my territory.'

"Here's your drink. Enjoy. I like your glasses," she says with another wink.

"Oh great, you found the napkins, too. Thanks, Meredith." I can relax with her a bit now. She really is a pretty woman, with open, generous features very much like mine. But her face is fuller, less intense. My hair is brown and her hair, like right now against the blue velvet of the chair, looks jet black like our mother's.

"Did I ever tell you my theory about you, Judith?"

"No. Do you think I can take it?"

"I don't know. I'm going to give it to you though." She rearranges herself more comfortably in the chair before continuing. "It seems to me that all of this"—a sweep of her arm is meant to include my whole room into her observation. "Oh, look at those masks! I didn't notice them before. They're fascinating. Kind of scary."

"We used those in the street theater."

"Oh right, you told me about your gypsy days."

"My 'Stop the War in Vietnam' days, you mean, Meredith."

"That's what I mean—all of this, the masks, the used furniture. Don't you think this is your rebellion against our mother? You know when you were a kid, you were either so goody-goody or you were crying for her. You couldn't even stay over at some-

body else's house without me having to comfort you, or else Mom had to come and take us both home. I really resented that."

"This is me trying to be creative without very much money."

"Well, that's your choice. You have a Master's degree in art. You could be teaching."

"Let's not tell each other how to live. But back when we were little, I didn't mean to be such a baby. Everybody must have treated me like *the baby.*"

"That's right. You were the baby, not me. Mom really spoiled you. You did everything she wanted you to do, then. But now?"

"She's a powerful woman in her way."

"Powerful my eye. She's a manipulative witch."

"She ain't no angel. That's for sure."

"We were just visiting them. Mom was just impossible."

"I didn't know that."

"Mom was just impossible."

"Living with Dad can't be all that great. He always puts a pipe wrench into her enthusiasm. Actually, they both bottle each other up emotionally. They need us kids around to get out their shit."

"Well, she sure did act out."

"What happened?"

"Poor Rico was trying his best to be really helpful. He was really sweet. He asked if he could make an Italian meal for them. He's a great cook."

"Yah, I know."

"Mother asked him in that accusing voice she has, what he wanted to cook. And then without waiting for him to tell her, she says, 'I don't want any garlic in my kitchen.' "

"She has a thing against garlic. She loves onions but she hates garlic. What is it? "

"Maybe we don't want to know."

"Yah, maybe we don't."

"So Rico says, 'I won't use garlic, but I want to make linguini with red clam sauce.' "

"'Oh no,' she says. 'We don't want that in our kitchen do we

Dad?' Poor Dad didn't know what to say. He felt caught in between. You would have thought that Rico was trying to sell her a picture of Marilyn Monroe nude. "' The last time I let somebody use my stove' she says, 'there was spaghetti sauce all over the wall and in the stove.' 'But Mom,' I say, 'Rico's just trying to be helpful.' 'That's very kind of you, Rico,' she says—she didn't mean it—' but Father will take us all out for dinner, won't you father?' We ended up going to a new Kentucky Chicken place in town. Can you imagine?"

"It must have been terrible, though I think I do understand why women get very bossy about their kitchens."

"Why?" she asks.

"It's one of the few places they can show their power and have it be accepted."

"Well, I can't buy that. So I say, 'What about the club, Mom,?' 'No, we're taking you there for your birthday luncheon, Meredith. This is your father's plan.' I hate the way she doesn't even take responsibility for herself. Can you imagine? And they didn't invite Rico or the boys to go to the club on my birthday. I almost didn't go, but then I thought, Oh, what the heck, I only see them once a year anyway. But when they come out to visit us—we wine and dine them. I just don't get it. They won't give sometimes. And after all we spent on airfare to get there. Rico's folks are so much more accepting of people. They think Mom and Dad are very judgemental."

"Look, Mom and Dad have their good points. Don't forget that. They hold their own. I appreciating them more and more."

"You hardly ever go see them, Judith."

"I'm appreciating them from a distance. It's hard to have other people come into your house. You never know what they're going to say about it. Right, Meredith?"

"How come you always defend them, especially Mother? Why can't you just call a spade a spade? Do you realize they wouldn't tell people you were married to a Jewish person? In fact, I don't think they told people you were married at all."

"They were ahead of me. Come on, Meredith, we've got to joke about some of this." When I make a funny face by tucking

my upper lip up and showing my teeth in a grimace I see that she has made exactly the same face.

"Introducing the Wallerby twins," she croons and both of us burst into fits of nervous laughter.

"Okay, so now that we know a spade is a spade." I wriggle my lips back into place. "She can be a pill at times. Remember the time she caught us sifting through McIntyre's garbage pails, speaking of pills. And we found boxes of orangecolored little pills that we thought were M & M candies? How she dragged us home, one in each hand, flying down the sidewalk? She spanked us both even though we said we didn't eat them. She just wanted to teach us a lesson for the future. That was one of the few times she spanked us."

"That's right, we weren't battered children, maybe a little manipulated. They told us what to do instead of ask us what we wanted. I remember that time. She said we were really going to get it from Father when he came home, so we hid in the basement, in the little cellar behind the windows over the ping pong table. Remember that?"

"Oh, that was my favorite hiding place," I say.

"And we stayed there until it got dark and then we got hungry and scared. And you probably started bawling for Mother."

"Come on, I didn't always do that, Meredith! They were so glad to see us that they forgot to spank us."

"I think we all went out for ice cream cones at Jones' dairy after supper. See, they weren't all that mean."

"I know, just uptight."

"They wanted to do their jobs well."

"Exactly. In their way, they were dedicated parents," I say.

"It's just too bad they couldn't have been more relaxed about it. Had more fun in those days."

"But it was great how we used to stick together during times like those. What are you looking at?"

"Who's that on the wall by the desk?" she asks.

"Oh, that's a friend of mine."

"You always say that word, *friend*, as if you were talking about a fantastic, secret person."

"I do?"

"Yes, you do."

"Maybe I say it like you say *my kids* , like you have the exclusive right to them."

She ignores my response as she goes to the photographs. They are photos of Mari. She focuses on the one showing us together, leaning towards each other smiling.

"I guess you know her quite well."

"I like to think I do. She's a special friend."

"What do you mean, *special* friend?"

"It's hard to describe. She lives on the other side of the world. It's not like I call her up every day or anything like that. I just wish...." My voice has caught in my throat. In one more second I will be sobbing. I can't let that happen. Meredith won't understand.

"Where is she from, France?"

"Argentina."

"How exotic."

"Yes and no. The political situation there is very frightening."

"How did you meet her?"

"We met through a friend of Josh's who thought we would like each other."

"Oh." She turns away from the wall and goes back to the chair, immediately diving into her purse.

I get a hold of myself with a long drink of wine. "She speaks Spanish you know, Meredith, and I don't, so we sometimes have a hard time communicating. So we make faces and act out, that kind of thing. You might say we're playful together."

"You know, could I say something, Judith?"

I didn't think she was listening to me.

"Did you ever think that you treat your friends like your children. Everybody needs a family. You and Josh should have had a kid."

"I did think of that. She's a fantastic person. She lived here, in this room, with me. Now she lives in Argentina and the situation is very, very dangerous there."

Meredith's attention is now focused on a small date book.

"It was fun trying to tell her about life in the mid-west, growing up there. Like how every spring we dug little holes in the earth and played marbles. Remember, Meredith?"

"Sorry. I had to check where I was meeting Rico." The date book is put away. I have her attention again.

"Oh, I remember that," she says. "We were good at it. Didn't we always divide up our loot at the end of the day?"

"I don't remember that. But also mumbletypeg. That was the one game I always beat you at."

"Mumbletypeg? What's that?"

"You don't remember? The game with the knife?"

"I never played with knives. Maybe you did. You did lots of things I didn't do. You used to sneak away whenever we had to help mother cook for the holidays. You left me alone in the house; I remember now. You just disappeared. Where did you go?"

"I probably went to Davey Johnson's garage. Remember Davey? He loved to play spy and detective. He always wore the neatest black gloves. It was amazing how many kids couldn't take being in their houses on those family gatherings, just like me. Didn't you ever come with me? We felt like the outcasts. I don't know what we did. Probably played doctor and nurse."

"But why didn't you tell me where you went? You always said you just took a walk around the block. I always thought you were running away from our chores."

"No, just getting away from the tension in the house. I couldn't tell you because I felt guilty, like I was betraying you by having my own friends. Didn't you ever feel guilty if you loved somebody as much as me?"

"I never had a problem with it."

"Besides you were always busy fixing your nails or your hair. I didn't think you missed me that much, you know."

"But that's so sad."

"Look, I think twins have a very complex set of feelings to deal with when it comes to making relationships with other people. Don't you? I want to tell you about a twin I met about three years ago. It was the first time I really talked to another twin

about being one. In some ways it was fantastic. But in other ways it was dreadful. It's all about keeping boundaries and respect. It was incredible how much I didn't understand before then how being a twin..."

"How come you always put down our being twins! I'm proud of it. Why can't you just accept that we are twins?" Her direct look is completely candid and disarming.

"I didn't think I was doing that, Meredith. I'm just aware that we feel uptight about each other. Why can't we talk about that?"

"I don't really have the time to think that much about it right now. That all seems like the past. I have my family to take care of. You're so serious, Judith. I forgive you for running away from me. You can have your own friends. It's okay."

"I didn't know you missed me that much, Meredith."

She looks at me with a forced smile on her face. It's like she's making a brave smile for my sake. Her eyes are clouded over.

"Oh, Meredith, I wish we lived closer."

"Why? You seem to do all right without me." She has that 'don't touch me,' look in her eye again. Boy, she's tough. She can't decide whether to eye the photos of Mari again or my well-worn couch. She picks the couch. "Except you could use help decorating this place," she says.

"I forgot to tell you the name of my friend from Argentina. It's Mari. Like your Mari. But she's a woman Mari."

"No kidding, Judith." The sound of ice clinking in her glass unnerves me along with her sardonic tone. "That's the Mari you told me about on the phone one time," she adds quickly to warm me up a few degrees.

"I did? I don't remember that." A tight feeling in my chest makes me want to let out a scream or shout. But I say calmly, "Let's have a half glass more of the wine. Are you hungry?"

"A little, but I'm meeting Rico soon. Remember?"

"How come he didn't come with you?"

"He thinks sisters should have time alone together."

"That's really thoughtful of him."

"Besides I told him he couldn't come. I don't get to see my

twin very often."

"Oh, I see," I say.

I find some Vermont cheddar in the refrigerator, some hot Italian peppers, green peppers and crackers. Very soon a plateful of hors d'oeuvres appears.

"Something's happening between us," she says.

"Between who, Meredith?"

"Between Rico and me."

"What do you mean?"

"There's like a wall coming between us. I just can't fit into the old ways any more and he doesn't like it."

"Maybe that's why he's depressed."

"For example, I needed my own car, one registered in my name. I drive to work every day. This disturbs him. Can you believe it? Like I'll drive away and leave him. Maybe the women libbers are getting to me."

"Worse things could happen to you. So you're just being strong and independent. Is that it?"

"Something like that. But I don't want to be alone or open all my own doors and pay all the bills. And I'm too old to have a roommate again. There's a limit to this kind of thing."

"Meredith, you know, I'd like us to be closer. I mean at least emotionally. I think I understand us better. We have to stop wanting the other one to be like us. Then we could just enjoy our differences,don't you think? In some ways I wish I was more like you. Cooler about things. I'm too anxious. And it seems like you're reaching out to me. You know, you were very cruel to me a few times. I have a theory why you had to be mean to me."

"Oh poor thing. Where does it hurt?"

"Don't be sarcastic. I'm talking to you. I think you needed to hurt me because you were hurt by Mother's affinity towards me. You know, we've never talked about how Mom picked me as her favorite and Dad picked you. But I guess we don't have time to talk about that right now."

"No, we don't. I don't think I can take the drama today, frankly."

"You always ask me about Josh, but you hardly ask me

about me, about my life now. Except perfunctorily. You don't seem to really want to know me in some ways. Do you see how you need to ignore me?"

"I know you. I lived with you for eighteen years."

"But do you know me?"

"What's the big secret, Judith?"

"Look, I haven't been alone for all the years after Josh and I separated."

"So?"

"It's important for you to know this."

"Come on, Judith, spill it. I've got to leave in two minutes."

"I've not just been with men. I'm with women too. I'm bi-sexual."

She looks perplexed, frightened, put off.

"I don't see any men's pictures on the wall, Judith."

"Okay, so now I'm just with women."

"There's a word for that you know? But I don't want to hear it."

"Yes, I make love with women. I sleep with women. Do you understand?"

She turns away from me, pulls her bag onto her lap, takes a deep breath, then zaps me.

"That's disgusting," she says, looking me straight in the eye.

I watch some terrifying image work its way through her body, like a snake; she tightens up against it. All looseness from the wine has left her.

I have difficulty breathing. My jaw clenches.

"I don't think you're disgusting, but it's disgusting to do that," she says.

"Meredith, you can never listen to me. What does it mean to say you're proud of us being twins if you can't accept me?"

"I don't want to hear any more."

She has cut off my oxygen supply.

"Anyway, it's been lovely," she says. She rises woodenly. "Thanks for the cold drink and hors d'oeuvres. I'm glad I got to see your place. I love this chair." She pats it.

"Can't we do something tomorrow? I'd love to take you and

Rico out to lunch. Maybe in Soho?"

"Oh, we're going to be gone. We've been here for three days and that's enough. We're going to visit Jonathan and Sally in Boston."

I suddenly feel jealous that she is closer to our brother. "I didn't know that."

"How could you? I didn't tell you."

"My own brother and sister-in-law never call me. I don't even think of him as my brother any more."

"Do you call them? "

"I used to."

"Well, maybe you have to change your life style. You are a bit too radical for all of us. Remember my theory. Try to fit in with others. You seem to look for trouble as if trouble didn't already come looking for us."

"Listen, Meredith. It takes two to be friends."

"There you go with that word again."

"To communicate."

"Look, I've got all I can handle with my two kids and a husband."

"Can't Mario and Sal visit me? They like me."

"Well, you can reach out to them, you know. I'm not stopping you or them."

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"Listen, I really have to go. They are waiting for me."

"I'm so glad you came. Let's keep in touch more." I'm clutching my fists to hold back my tears. I can't believe she can be so cold to me. She doesn't hug me goodbye.

"I'll say hello to the boys for you."

"Would you?"

"Sure. And send me your tape."

She slips out the door, almost tripping on the police bar set on an angle between door and floor. I hear her sandals slapping against the steps.

Somewhere on the stairway she calls out to me in a singsong voice, "Judith, I can't help it. I just love my guys. They're my family!"

"Oh, Jesus, Meredith. You fucking jerk haven't understood anything I meant!" The words bounce back to me probably unheard as the door springs shut. I turn back to my room, numb.

Mari's eyes, burning out from one of the photos are the only source of life in what now feels like a dead, joyless space, filled with pathetic furniture and macabre papier-máché masks.

* * *

13 de Septiembre, Buenos Aires

Dear Judith,

You did not answer me, the last letters. I write and write and still no answer. But I will come to your city on the 15 de Septiembre.

Could you to meet me at the airport. In your morning. There is only one flight to arrive from New Orleans where I come from.

I tell you all about my visit and I am afraid you cannot support that.

But I need that you be there for me. I have tryt to call you but seem no one answer and I am staying at house without a phone right now. If you cannot come to the airport, I will take a taxi and go to a cheap hotel in the midtown.

I will call you from there. It is so much better for me if you are there to meet me.

Mari

My Mari, my darling, my love, my own. My body and soul are returning to me. Mari, the woman of my dreams, the substance of my life is coming to me in two days. Mari, my person, my hands, my face, my child, my lover, my sister, my mother, my friend, my family, my self, my life, my thought, my food, my joy, my laughter, my struggle, my pain, my reward. Oh Mari, my song, my wonder, my fear, my own Mari.

I have filled our separation with visions of togetherness. I have made a beautiful home for us filled with suggestive images where you have space to fill in with your needs, your wisdom. I have decorated your fingers with butterfly rings, your ears with crystals, your ankles with beads. I have woven a protective net

around your thoughts and words. I have asked your mother for your hand, your body, your life. She has finally understood my strength. I have not forgotten the pain I once caused you; I will heal those old wounds. You are my holy and human love. I have remembered your passion and I have kept mine for you. I have dared to be in love with you. I have learned how to love you.

Mari is coming to unite with me. God is giving me this great gift of her. This time I am ready for her. I know her. I have understood our differences; I have joyed in our similarities. Mari is the companion I deserve.

My house has been scrubbed clean. It looks sore with rubbing. Breads, fruits, vegetables, cheeses fill the refrigerator. There is enough food for a dozen returning lovers. There is wine from Argentina, coffee from Brazil, nuts from Peru. This is a home. We will toast our sacred union. Candles are placed on all the places you have known: the tiled hearth, the old piano, the radiator—remember how its sputterings gave the house a voice for you! Here is a desk where you can write.

Your plane will be arriving in just a few moments. My heart is in my mouth. My head is pounding. My hands are cold. I am numb. I am afraid. I am not me. I am tranquillized. Everything is in order. I have the perfect rose to give you. I am yours.

"Oh, look, Judith. She is hurted." Mari stands in front of me and begins calmly tracing the broken stem of the rose I hold.

I stare at my flower, feeling that I cup splintered glass. The rose has collapsed. It has just leaned over and snapped.

We hardly embrace. We ride back to the city in a strange vacuum. She only stays with me a few nights; the rest of the time she stays with Josh on the Upper West Side. We are not comfortable in close quarters together. She is not the Mari I imagined. I have wedded myself to my constructed Mari, my work of art Mari. And three and a half years have coated her with an unfamiliar patina.

There is no self-conscious grin she borrows from childhood to please me. There are no adoring eyes which hold me like handcuffs. There is no open face to nest in. There is no Mari, my Mari.

When she told me calmly that she did not want me to touch her in a sensual way, but lie next to her as a sister would, I reacted as if she had spoken the unspeakable. I had not connected deeply, emotionally to anyone else during her absence. I had been faithful to her. I who preached change longed for constancy. I who had imagined us finding ourselves in each other's arms was stuck again with myself. There was never a forever.

There was no apology or hesitation in her voice when she said her body was still with Rhonda, a young woman she had slept with the night before in New Orleans. They had met only a few days before during her stay in Texas, where Mari had given several poetry readings. Rhonda had made her feel alive after a long period of spiritual and physical repression. There was no hesitation in my body either when I coiled away from her like a frightened snake. How could she have made love with someone she hardly knew? How could she have told me about it? I was not the North American who had stirred her sexually again.

Someone is screaming.

"Mari, you locked Sancha out in the hallway! I told you to be careful. You want my cat to die, don't you? The people on the third floor say they'll put her away for good if she pees on their doormat again."

I am screaming.

The tears she sheds do not act like other tears. They do not fall. They are like jewels stuck to the cheeks of a carved Jesus; they are covered with dust.

"I told you to be careful," I repeat not looking at her. My voice is cold, ice.

I am looking at my hands; they are so far away, so small as I say, "You are so careless with my life. You traipse in and out of it so unexpectedly, as if only you counted." I can feel my fingers moving across the scars in the wooden table.

"I didn't lock her out," she says. "I didn't. I didn't leave this room. You did, Judith when you ran out two hours ago."

I had run out on my celebration dinner for Mari, leaving her and Josh alone to reminisce. I must not have noticed Sancha

following me. But right now I can't hear Mari. I can't tell if her English has improved or not.

"Oh," I say. "Oh, I'm so sorry. Have you been here long?," speaking formally as if to a stranger. She is a stranger. She is not my Mari.

"There's no sorry, Judith. It's just the way life takes us."

"Won't you stay here more than two months?" I sound so hurt. "We won't have the time it takes to get to know each other again. We won't have a chance to be close ever again."

Mari eyes me squarely. "I wrote to you several letters talking about this. I tried to be clear and kind. I am so sorry that they didn't arrive to give you a chance to be with yourself about this. You would have had time to go to therapy to help you support the situation or you could have told me not to come to you. But I am only staying for two months."

Mari is very tall. I can hardly see her eyes. I am making horrible sounds. I am on the floor twisting and writhing. She is making strange distorted faces at me. She doesn't understand what I am saying because I am not making sense.

I hear someone talking. "This is killing me. I no longer want to yearn like this for another person who can't be with me. This is the most unreal love relationship I have ever known. One of these days I'll see you walk right through my door like a ghost. I'll see you, Mari and I'll put my hand right through your heart."

Mari is patting my head. I am crawling on all fours, a wounded animal.

My imagined shape of our relationsip has died. Its legs stuck straight up stiffly. Mari stands in front of me manifesting her own shape. All I have to call my own right now is the image of a dead cat.

The next day another letter arrived from Mari.

9 de julio Arroyo Felipe

My friend,

I needed to wait several days before write you. To quiet the storm of emotion your letter awake inside me. You are right in many ways, but seem that some time is one of your sides who

answer me and some time are the others, and they don't match with my own different selves, specially through letters.

Yes, Estella grew with my home in some way, but she is not my home. I have not that. I have only a bleed land and a destiny. I love her deeply, but I'm not in love with her, that mysterious thing, you awoke in me, creative love and passion, painful and joyful at same time. All the last month I was listening the tapes you send me and thinking intensely of you and of you and me together and thinking that maybe the renunciation that something inside me made, choosing be here and not there, with you—was too much, was not right.

I will try to tell you two things at the same time: One is a great news, almost still a secret we were working on with a feminist culture grant organizaiton. Still, I cannot say when. I will propose next Septermber, but I don't know what she will think about it. Yes, I might come to your country again.

This is the plan. I go to USA by two months. First I go to Louisiana where is this feminist organization and where I can study at a University there to learn more complete the English language structure. Also I can to give a series of readings in the south. Then I travel to New York and stay there the rest of the time. The cultural organization, Bridge Between Women, give me a grant to initiate a bridge between feminist writers of Argentina and the USA. For this work I can obtain a short visa. Part of my job is to expand my knowledge of the feminist poets and interview as many women as I can. But I will come for only 2 months that is sure. Maybe readings could be arrange for me there by someone in New York.

I know the most important thing for me is to meet you. But you need to help me. I will stay there only two months and after I will come back to Argentina where I decide to live. You love, you have nothing to do here. You will die living here, and I cannot stay in your country. I don't know if you want to meet me again knowing I will left you soon. Also is terribly painful for me, but nevertheless I want see you and hold you and talk you those weeks.

I never forget you my love, but time and distance and histori-

cal events make strange things in the heart of the people.

When I begin to write you, I have this Spanish folksong, very old in my mind.

De los alamos vengo, madre
De ver como los menea el aire.
De los alamos de Sevilla
De ver a la mi linda amiga.
De los alamos de Granada
De ver a la mi linda amada.

To make the words for you to sing would be something like this:

From the poplar groves, Mother, I return
Where the wind is shaking the branches.
From the poplars of Seville
Where I met my beautiful woman friend.
From the poplars of Granada
Where I was with my beautiful woman lover.

I almost stop my leather work because leather become so expensive and most of the people have not money to pay this kind of objets here now. So I only work by order now, when the people give me half of money by advance to buy the materials.

About the book of North American women poets in which I was working so long. The publisher answered me that I made a "magnificent job," and that they are great poets, but the book are not sufficiently commercial, so they will not publish it.

I want to know what do you think about all this. Please talk to me in an open way, sweet one.

Four months ago I promised to go to Brasil in March because I'm doing some works for a magazine with other people there. I have an offer to work and live there. I will go there, but will not left Argentina.

It is a hot midday now. A humming bird serenade the house. I go to talk by radio with X, then swim a little in the river, before

to begin my work. Te abrazo tieran, entranablemente mi querida. Quisiera cuidarte de todo male, quisiera cuidarte de mi.

Mari

* * *

It is one of the letters she has told me she had sent to warn me of her coming. It is two months late.

I convince myself that the published feminists she will meet and interview will use her. They will see her as an exotic, intriguing, mysterious person. They will abuse her child-like generosity. Morning, noon, and night they will call her for the facts on South America. Can she lecture in their classrooms? they will ask. Can she translate their poems? They will not appreciate her as I do.

Day after day she will have breakfast at the Laissez-Faire Restaurant with a different feminist star. Where will she get the money? She is not used to paying so much for conversation. She is learning to do business without me. I begin to see how calculating and even heartless she can be. I wish I had some of her shrewdness. She has skills she needs to survive and to thrive.

She will have to stay at Josh's place. I will avoid her for several days at a time even if she does call me. And if she presses me for intellectual, analytical conversations, while placing autumn leaves in the books the famous ones have given her, then I will tell her I am tired and must leave immediately. I will not compete with them for her admiration. I will not. And about her poetry readings. I will have to see if I can put my energy into that or not.

* * *

Slowly over the next days and weeks, we shift into an uneasy alliance. I try to play the part of a gallant old friend.

Mari and I ride in an old Chevrolet driven by Maya. I am sitting alone in the back. We are headed for Bennington, Vermont, where I will give a concert and Mari will give a poetry reading—ironically on the same night but at different places.

She is bragging about her country again. "Spring is just coming now in my land. Never is there anything as beautiful as our

spring. How can you stand the cold here? My whole body closes up when she is cold. Why do you want to suffer in the whiteness? In the icicles?"

Don't let her talk that way about your territory. Speak up. "I like seeing the trees bare down to their skeletons," I say. "I like to see what they really look like. In the winter, when I'm cold, I feel my bones." I try to ignore Maya, whose eyes seem more glued on Mari than on the road.

I continue, "Mari, don't you remember that time at Alice and Dora's house? How nice it was to sit with them around the fireplace, especially after playing in the snow? Only when you know cold can you really appreciate warmth. Don't you think?"

Mari is not hanging onto my every word.

Still I say, "I like to see the gray-haired people come out in the forest in winter," I continue with self-conscious animation. "And in the spring I like to see blood come up from the roots."

As I throw out images, she turns to Maya excitedly and whispers something in Spanish. Maya is majoring in Spanish literature and in Mari. She tries to ignore me. They melt and bubble together. I could use a warm wind to wrap myself in.

Maya is the one who will share my next to last night with Mari.

Mari has come again to leave me, I think over and over in rhythm with the turning wheels. I do not want to die when she leaves me again.

She still wears blue jeans. Are they the really good pair she bought at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street the first time she was here, or was it the second time? Or was it yesterday I watched her showing them off? Orange leaves rain down on the car windows.

This woman with the shy chin, the staring eyes that once spun into me, this enigma with the sun-moon face has not come to live with me. The stem of the rose cracked in my hands and that means her petals will no longer brush against mine. I must tell her that our growing season is over for good. We have both become grave diggers.

The car turns onto a dirt road. Fields on either side are filled with small, white butterflies and horses.

Once Mari pranced like a horse up my steps to see me. Today she walks solidly in her own shape. She has begun to root herself in her beloved soil. The night before I dreamt she was training a wild horse to gallop around and around a bird who kept opening its beak as if to sing. But all that came out of its beak were bits of gravel and glass and torn roses. Could I have been the bird that she imprisoned with her circling?

No one else is in sight. Maya stops the car at a white, wooden farmhouse. There is old farm equipment lying casually about. She says too gaily, "This is where I live. Make yourselves at home. I have to go to the college and make the arrangement for Judith's concert and for your reading, Mari. I'll be back in a few hours to pick you up. Better rest now."

Mari goes into the kitchen to make tea. I can't rest. I walk through Maya's house, checking out each of the rooms carefully as if looking for a clue to how to proceed. I feel confused. Concentration on my work has been difficult, so I've brought tape recordings of marimba and voice improvizations to listen to as preparation for the evening's concert. One of them is the last song I have been able to create, the song I made for Mari three and one half years ago. One hundred ninety-two weeks ago. One thousand, three hundred, forty-four days ago. I'll sing that song tonight:

. . .When I go to sleep at night
And I'm resting from the day,
Footsteps take me away.
Oh, its real to love a woman,
Yes, it's real. . .

I go into one of the rooms and begin to play the tape of this song for her. But the absurdity of playing this song about someone who is now with me overcomes me. When it gets to the part, "The stars are falling in her eyes," I cry, shut off the tape recorder and go to look for her, my sky animal.

The back door is open. She has left a clue. I know where to find her. Where the horses romp with the clouds and the butter-

flies take long rides on the backs of tortugas. My footsteps sound like bass drum beats as I walk on the dirt road.

I find her in the field. She is walking away from me. When I call out to her she stops and sits down on an old log. I go to her and sit beside her.

"I'm not in love with you any more, Judith." As she speaks, she does not look into my eyes. "I know myself. If I were still in love with you, or if I fell in love with you again, I would stay longer. And there is the work I must do in my country."

I hear a loud crashing sound. A branch from the tree where the horses had galloped has fallen just a few yards from us.

"You could have written to me how you felt."

"I wrote to you as much as I could. But you can see, the letters don't arrive and only one finally came. I tried to talk about it with you. But I didn't know until I got here."

"You mean when you saw me, your heart didn't bounce around in your chest and bells start to ring. Your crotch didn't blaze. The heavens didn't open and angels start singing, 'Alleluia.' What a bag of garbage! What the fuck do you think I am? Some object you can bounce your emotions off of? I thought we were way past that. That falling head-over-heels in love stuff. If we aren't in love with each other, then what is love and what is our relationship about anyway? I have given you my heart and soul for the last three and a half years. I haven't been able to write any songs during this time; all my creative energy went to you. I wanted you to be with me, my mate, for our life. What is this anyway?"

"I don't know," she says.

She shrinks before my eyes. She seems like a kid looking for an instant high. Immediate gratification. A star gazer, that's what she is. To her, being in love with someone means to feel complete ecstasy. She hasn't changed one bit after all. Except that I am not the source of her ecstasy. I hate it that she has some kind of power over me. The power to hurt me. Telling me she isn't in love with me any more seems as cruel as telling a child there is no Santa Claus. Can't she lie a little bit? Never will our mouths reach for each other again. Never will we find the sexual

embrace again. It's going to take more than one fifteen-minute crawling and screaming ritual to heal me.

Mari doesn't look at me. Her eyes are filling with water. An ocean separates us. I can't call my love Mari anymore. My taboo love once again has no name.

Self-pitying thoughts blow up into terrifying images. I watch a uniformed man plunge hot wires into the vaginas and penises of several blindfolded people strapped on metal-tables in a small airless cell. I watch myself run terrified from another uniformed man who is out to arrest me, arrest my love.

I flee to reeds by a small lake and hide.

Speech-like fragments fill my mind: Cage us, beat us, imprison us. Take away our homes, our salaries, our jobs, our rights, our children, our lovers, but you can never destroy the flowering of the human soul. I repeat, You can never destroy the flowering of the human soul!

"You came six thousand miles to tell me you aren't in love with me anymore? How insipid, you asshole," I whisper, feeling like a cricket with a broken leg.

"I came to see you again, Judith, and to do my work."

She is so together. I can't believe it. I am hiding other fears.

In one of the tapes I have received from Mari she said many Argentine citizens were being abducted by the military. Either their bodies or accounts of their torture turned up later. She said she had been in prison for a few weeks. She did not say if she had been tortured. The fear, the fact that someone I knew, loved, touched, might have been tortured was one I was incapable of comprehending or accepting. I am afraid to question her about this. Afraid of uncovering horrifying wounds.

Once I was driven to locate her psychically when I hadn't heard from her for four months. The silence between us was destroying me. On a simple wood altar I placed some things she had left behind: the sandals from Mexico made from rubber tires; a tan army shirt she had worn when we painted the apartment in Brooklyn; the doll I called Zorra, photographs, writings.

At this altar I meditated in candle light until I heard a voice say, "She is all right. She is with Uruguay." Mari was alive! She

was still some place on this earth. Months later I learned that Mari had become lovers and companions with Estella, who came from Uruguay and they shared a small cabin together. Whether that voice came from within, or whether it flew on electrical waves from far away to me, I didn't know. I knew that Mari was safe. Yet I still did not know if she had been tortured or not.

"Mari," I say softly to the woman from Argentina in front of me. "I'm going back to the house now and prepare for tonight's concert. We can talk more later."

* * *

For two hours I sing for an audience of a hundred-and-twenty women. They witness my visions, my vulnerabilities, my hopes, my wounds. I share my earth songs with them, dressed in a long red robe. Many young women seem both intrigued and frightened by the extent to which I reveal my emotions. My ardent flights as well as my inner subtleties are strange to them. Through long melodic passages and poetical imagery, I sail alone up and down the marimba, playing out my impressions. I express who I am, inspiring others to do the same.

As I sing the last words of the last song with mellow marimba sounds, a woman opens a small leather suitcase in front of me. By the time I have placed my blue yarn mallets in their holders on the side of the rosewood instrument and applause has disappeared into exuberant chatter, she has displayed an array of butterfly jewelry.

I kneel in front of her. Some of the pieces are so intricately wrought in colored stones I have to look at them twice to find the images of brilliant small insects in them. I look for her rings.

She begins to tell me about herself. "I've sold three bracelets, two sets of earrings and a setting for a necklace already. But no rings. They are waiting for you. I couldn't stop looking at you all evening. And it's so strange, I almost didn't bring the rings at all tonight. They have not been selling as well as the other jewelry. When women buy rings now, they prefer the double-axe or the woman's symbol. But some unexplainable voice coaxed me to bring this set. Which one do you like best?" The

middle-aged woman walks her fingers across the rings in front of me adding more magic to their already magical appearance.

"It's true. A lot of women wear rings with symbols of power. But I've been looking for a butterfly ring for ages. Delicate things make me feel strong. What I mean is, there is strength in knowing one's fragility. And after all, we're only as strong as the sum of all of our parts."

As I speak, a certain green-colored stone shaped into a butterfly attracts me. "This is the one I want!" I light upon the ring almost hungrily.

As she wraps it up, she tells me her name—Margaret. She has joined a tribe of thirty people, all of whom make jewelry and travel around the country selling their wares. They usually stay at motels and work a radius of fifty miles, before moving on to the next place. That night they would stay near Bennington.

She has heard from some of the students there that I would be playing on the marimba tonight—the same intrument she used to play when she was a youngster. So she has come with her rings. "I used to be married to a famous novelist," she confides to me. Her kind face is framed by luxurious silver hair. "We lived in the suburbs and I had six kids. Then one day when I was in my 40 s I packed up and left him, and that life ended. I took the three youngest kids with me and have not returned. Sometimes my older children come to stay with me, too. Now I am me—I am doing finally what feels right."

I hug her warmly then, even though I am momentarily caught by an unexplainable shyness as she says, "There is something so deeply felt about your music, Bird, and about the way you sing it. So touching and so natural. I would like to give you this ring."

"If you would like, we could make a trade. I'll give you a record of my music and you can give me the ring. I would feel good about that."

After we exchange our wares, I feel a sense of relief. I don't have to be jealous of Mari; I have my work too and my admirers.

Later that night it rains fiercely. The mass murders are beginning in Guyana. The murders of Harvey Milk and Mayor Masconi

are being fantasized in the mind of a sick man. It is a heavy night.

It is the kind of night someone you have loved for six years tells you she is not in love with you any more and another friend tells you she cannot be close to you because you live in the city and she lives in the country. It is the kind of night that lovers and friends end their relationships and strangers declare new love.

On a night like this it takes more than candles and wine to lift my spirits. It takes the presence of Margaret with her unexpected gift. What a strange day and night it is, as mysterious and fragile as dreams, as roses, as butterflies.

* * *

22 de Diciembre

Dearest Judith,

I find your letter after to be in jail for identification. I still have a little cell inside me.

I didn't receive the letters you say send me and because the political situation here many letters was and will be lost. What did you told me there for example about Joan of Arc? I feel so difficult to write letters tonight, but I want so much to be connected with you and so I try. But this seems so tight.

Today I'm afraid more than others, for me, for friends and people and children will grow through all this terrible time here and all over latinoamerica. I feel you are keeping and blessing me, love, along all the terror. Did I tell you what happen to a dear friend of mine? I saw her on a Friday night and we make up to meet again on the following Sunday. We were starting to make the music together, playing the earthy folk song of the farmworker people, much of it from Indian heritage. When I went to her house not far from me, there was no one there, no sign of her and there was like the daily things all around, the dishes on the table. None of her friends know where she is either and I am so worried for her.

I went to the dentist last year. I have a new tooth. I eat very few meat also and sugar. I don't smoke. I know the sea will be death in only 40 years more if we don't stop the blind capitalism

system all over the world.

Judith, mi mariposita, mi gringa Gelsomina, would you want to go through all this heavy language and then to let me touch your soul there? Though in many ways we are living a different reality, in other ways is the same.

Did you remember when we walked embracing to each other through 14th Street? And some time your short hair, curly and lovely hair from the nape of neck, touched my face, caress my face. And some time was my long hair who spoke to your ear, to the lobe of your ear, to the architecture of your ear where my tongue was swimming and making languages only the sacred bodies sanctify by love can understand. Oh Judith, when I try to write you is like if I would be dreaming and images close my eyes and open another eyes with them in a particular space and time.

I ask me how did you felt when we lived together, because I never could remake that kind of physical and spiritual emotion when to be with you became the more important intense dreadful event of universe manifest inside me.

Oh how I could lost that? How we can be living in different lives with different people if el amor es la unica patria I think sometime.

This morning I feel we never will touch and see again. Then I feel I can't support this feeling inside me and I try to change it.

Last time I went to my parents' house, I found a so diminute young tree they plant in the garden. I spoke a lot with it. I found it strange and lovely and I named it spirit of Judith growing in my land. So when I wanted to cry or to laugh, I ran towards the tree and shouted, "Spirit of Judith, Spirit of Judith," many times until to find a certain calm inside of me.

I would like to make for you a drawing of the black nocturnal butterflies flying here, sleeping so quiet during the day. Te amo mi patito feo. Don't leave me alone without your letters.

Mari

—I don't know how long I will stay here, but this is the time for me to be here. Most of the people I know is outside of the

country or outside of life or projecting to go out. For me is necessary to be here, because I'm finding the old-new contents from the deep America.

* * *

"I'm glad we can still to talk to each other," she says.

We sit in a booth at the Gold Penny Restaurant near my studio where you can get two eggs, home fries, toast and juice for fifty-nine cents. Her two-month visa is running out.

She spoons sugar into her coffee and heaps jam on her toast. What she does to her body is her own business now; I am not her surrogate mother.

"I like the way you teach," she says. "You're not like a lot of the feminists here, Judith." Her tone is surprisingly tender.

The night before she has read to a continuing education class I teach called Women and Language. She shared poems and experiences. She has made it clear to me that she cannot speak openly of her political situation for fear of severe repercussions upon her return. Officials would question her; her activities here were being monitored.

Mari told us how, despite the repression of women's creativity in South America, luminescent and surrealistic imagery can spring forth when women wrestle with the macho, patriarchal forces. She herself is an example of her beliefs. As poetry flowed from her wide, sensual mouth in Spanish, she expanded. And her enthusiasm with words opened my students like water opens pine coffins.

"The coffee in this restaurant is so delicioso, isn't it, Mari?" How good to share a creative situation again after many days of flatness between us. After all, I am her old friend star even if I am not one of the super stars she has become so intrigued with of late.

"You keep close to the grass roots and the working class, don't you? You live like so poor person," Mari says after a reflective moment.

"Yes, I do," I say, "and I'm glad we can still talk to each other, too."

In the mirror beside our table I see her smiling at me. I take a

sip of hot coffee. How would she treat me now if I were a media star, I wonder. She lights up a cigarette and sucks in deeply. I can't forget how the week before she pressed autumn leaves into a book by one well-to-do woman.

"I'm a culture worker," I say. My voice is harsher than I want it to be. My fingers move over the buttons on my shirt. They're all there. "I told you about my family, Mari. They're staunchly middle-class. But I feel myself to be something else. Not middle class. And not working class either."

I won't tell her that I long to lie on a beach in the Bahamas and luxuriate at a hotel with a long porch overlooking the ocean, and have people bring me delicious hor d'heurves. I'm sure she basks in glittering fantasies over cappucino uptown at the Laissez-Faire Restaurant.

She smiles but I concentrate on the salt shaker. There's no rice in it to keep the salt dry. The truth is once she was enamored of me and now she isn't, so big deal. She's inconstant. So is the moon.

Mari's eyes look like marbles. Does she really see me? I say, "I just don't want to be labeled, put in a box and separated from other people. Know what I mean?"

"Judith, I didn't label you; I defined you. I say you keep close to the working class, that's all. Is something bothering you? You seem so silent. Make a bridge for me so I can know what you think."

She's the one who's supposed to be building bridges between feminists! She ought to have been a bridge painter. Then she could always be with her bridges. They make a good wage. How can she act so calm? I feel like punching the wall.

"These eggs aren't bad. How's yours? Want some catsup?" I ask.

"I already have. Come on, Judith. Talk to me."

"I know you know what I mean. It's not that big a deal. But people forget—like you, Mari, you forgot to keep being in love with me. I'm sorry to bring that up again. What I mean is—well, it's like the difference for me between writing and playing music. With writing I have to have the exact word that illuminates my

thought. But with music I want the words to fly away, just get away from me, so I can get in touch with sounds again. Sounds and emotions. Know what I mean?"

"Wait a minute, Judith. You seem like insecto de agua, darting here and there. Make logical."

"I'm just saying I need to name and unname. Focus in—focus out. An energy starts up in this back and forth tension."

"That's the Hegelian dialectics. I know."

An angry voice breaks into our conversation. "No, Maria! Fill the creamers with this." A large mustached man behind the crowded counter is speaking. I stare at him. But he won't be put off and continues to rant at the waitress next to him.

Mari nods me to ignore them and I continue. "Words have their time, just like we do. The ones I use today might be outdated tomorrow. I don't want people to be suffocated by words. Like labels when they compress people into one dimensional objects. It's disgusting to do that to someone."

"Hokay, beautiful Judith. I follow exactly what you say. But also, I can hear hurt and anger in your voice. Come on, tell me. What's bothering you."

"Nothing. I'm just trying to tell you something, that's all. Still if a point has to be made quickly, labels can..."

"God damn it, woman! Do as I tell you." The angry man behind the counter is pointing at a small silver pitcher in front of him.

"But customers think there is milk or cream in their pitchers, not chemicals," the waitress says, in a surprisingly loud voice. "And personally I think it's a deceit not to inform them." She looks directly at us as if for support. I see she wears heavy make-up. Her hair is shiny black. Is she Puerto Rican or Italian? I'm not great at telling nationalities right off.

"Look, Judith." Mari shrugs at the man. She thrusts her middle finger into the air. "How's that for making a point quickly?" We both giggle like school girls.

And suddenly the tension and tears are gone from inside me. The harshness is gone from my voice too, as I continue. "There are definitely times when I want to call myself a lesbian and

times I just don't. I want to be seen as a whole person, not only as someone who goes to bed with women. People's minds light up lasciviously at the very word 'lesbian.' It's actually a beautiful word, you know, but it's so damn loaded."

"Here's where our political realities are so different from each other." Mari directs her eyes momentarily to the feisty waitress. "It's interesting how you can to choose whether to use the word lesbian or not. Remembers, in my country, I can't say that word at all publicly. That's courting the police for sure. So I don't talk openly about my sexuality because it just don't make the most important necessity of our struggle now."

"I can't comprehend what it would be like not to be able to talk about my sexuality—at least with someone. At the college where I teach in the evenings it's okay to be reasonably open, and I do have a community of people I can talk to."

"I can talk about my sexuality with my close compañera but homosexuality is considered by the majority of the people in my country to be sicky. Like the monsters. It would be disaster for me to go around carrying a flag saying I was a lesbian."

"I have visions of all homosexuals being forced to wear arm bands and gradually being carted off to camps. It's very, very scary."

"So, you know what I talk about, Judith."

"I know, Mari." But do I know? The kinds of suffering I have gone through over this word are not even within the parameters of her struggle. How ridiculous I have been to see her as consciously out to hurt me. My god, she's trying to survive, that's all. I'm glad gutsy people like that woman behind the counter exist. I'm glad Mari....

"Are you okay, Judith? You look so far away."

"I was just thinking about gutsy people. Mari, do you think I'm courageous? Here, I struggle from day to day about whether to tell anyone I'm a lesbian or not, while your struggle centers aound basic human rights. But still it's true that to be lesbian here takes some kind of fantastic courage, the courage to 'not mate in captivity'—to quote Gloria Steinem. But more than that, the courage to actually bond with other women when it's so

threatening to men. But it sure ain't easy."

"What is easy to make that's true?" Mari says. "If we're going to keep talking let me get a second coffee. Maybe you want, too. It makes me so happy to be talking like this with you again."

"Me too. Okay, I'll have a second cup, but no poison stuff for me."

"Which, the non-dairy creamer or the sugar?"

"Both."

Mari looks good. She sparkles when she enjoys a conversation. There really is a whole world we can share in thinking together—just appreciate our differences. It feels better to let her in. I'm just not going to worry about....

"Here, Judith. I brought you some real cream. Si? Go on now, but go slowly. You know, I move with the turtles."

"I know, but sure and steady is a winning combination, my friend." I hesitate. "I don't know much about what you've been going through the last few years." Could she tell me what I'm afraid to hear?

"Maybe when you are ready to know those things you will ask me. I survived."

She has seen through me. People ask questions when they're ready to ask them. She says, "Don't feel guilty for me. Because it is not like a true emotion."

"I'm not feeling guilty for you. I just want to know what happened to you."

"Well, I still think you have some aspect in you like to idolize me because I'm third world. Something like that."

No, Mari, I say to myself, I don't idolize you right now. I just want to know—did they put you in prison? Did they torture you ? I know about the electric goad, the grill, the dancing lady that they use on the vagina, the nipples. Oh, Mari, I'm not ready to know what happened to you. I'm still too full of my own hurt to be able to take in yours. Give me some more time. I will know when it's right to ask you. I say, "That was a crazy fight we had last weekend in that country store. It was so...."

"It seem funny to me now," she laughs.

"I really thought you knew that Tampax actually have asbes-

tos in them. And large tampons can collect harmful bacteria if they aren't changed regularly."

"I know that, Judith, but weren't you being the sarcastic with me when you say you were going to use rags again instead of the little plugs? I keep calling them Texacos."

Just then a tired looking waiter arrives at our table and begins to clear the dishes. He wipes the crumbs off sloppily, spilling several into our laps. Probably he is not paid enough to care.

"Tampax," I whisper as he moves on. "Isn't it an ugly name? But then, the name of what you use isn't any better. Kotex. God, what is the meaning of all these X words in trade names these days. Kleenex, Xerox, Exxon."

"I don't believe you really are going to use rags again like the poor women in Argentina use? Or a leetle sponge? I think you were joking me."

"I wasn't kidding. A lot of my friends are off of Tampax."

"Wait, Judith. I'll be right back." She has fled to the counter and is talking animatedly in Spanish with the waitress. So she must be puertorricueña, not Italian.

Maybe Mari doesn't want to talk about this. When she comes back to the table she says, "She say she thought I was French. Here. Share this hot chocolate with me. It's so funny how the peoples, even the Spanish people here, think I'm European." She sips the hot liquid.

"Well, you are partly."

"She added more sugar for me. I know it's disgusting. When all my tooth fall out you will say I told you so."

"I guess really it's your business, Mari."

"You're right. I was upset about the way Carol was ignoring me. That's how come there was that tension between us in the store. Just because she like you. Didn't make sisterly sense to me."

"She's wanted to be close to me for a long time and I always show up at her place with another girlfriend. I told her that I thought she was rude to you and she acted like she didn't even realize it. She said she'd write a note to you, because she really likes you."

"Don't make no difference to me, Judith."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Well, it does make me feel a stranger here. When the women are thoughtless to me I feel it's because they can never see me. And they can't see me without experiencing my reality."

"That's why I got so mad at you. You weren't hearing me. I don't buy all those luxuries and you know that."

"You still have the fierceness in you. You women are so intellectually concerned with being nice to the third world women here, but you don't know our day-to-day reality."

I reach for her cup of hot chocolate, feeling clumsy. Will she slap my hand? "What can I do, Mari? I'm stuck with myself."

"Don't avoid what I'm saying. You yelled like that in front of other people. And what you say? 'I'll underdevelop you if you don't listen to me.' I don't believe that you did that."

"I'm sorry. I tried to apologize to you in the car. But you can be so damned stubborn. I guess we still have to build a bridge between us."

"In my country it's very different than here."

How many times has she said this to me?

"Survival to us means to be able to live. Maybe someday you'll understand; not now."

"Damn, it, Mari. Don't patronize me."

"You peoples, all trying so hard to be 'upwardly mobile.' It's so ridiculous expression."

"Well, I'm not upwardly mobile. You say so yourself. And I'm not downwardly mobile either. I'm outwardly mobile. I'm trying to be aware of more and more."

"All this about survival. It's Madison Avenue campaign to make people feel they need to buy and buy. I walk down the street in your cities and the stuff you people throw away would be like the greatest gifts for my people."

"You know, Mari, you never used to harangue like this. I like it better when you talk to me about your Parana River and your tortugas. I'm getting tired of feeling like a digit to you. I don't want to always be lumped together with your terrible North Americanos Business Mens."

"I'm sorry, Judith, but there are people who honor the people and people who honor the money. The puertorricueño man over there behind the counter wants to make money by using the poison creamers. And he is not rich. But once you have a lot of monies you have to do so much to protects that monies like murder. Or if people are keeping the money from you, maybe you have to murder them."

I respond, "Only money is talking these days, and everybody is labeling everybody else."

"Be like me, my pretty one. I have walk between labels all my life: one leg in the poor people's flower patch and the other in the rich, educated people's gardens. In Argentina, the college-educated peoples generally become the bourgeois managers who want to control the workers and keep their positions. But I would like to help manage or better word, build a positive cultural, political atmosphere for the women in my country."

Always she is building, building. A wave of exhaustion comes over me. Can I stay listening to her? She's so intense. Also, she's on a coffee jag.

The place is thinning out a bit. Maybe we should go to my place. I'd love to lie down. I could listen to her better then. Maybe I could put my head in her lap. It would seem like listening to a story. It makes me tense to keep conversation up too long. That's why I need music. I really get restless with words.

We're two giant heads without bodies, bobbing and nodding animatedly. It's because we don't make love any more. Also, she smokes too much. She does everything too much. Talks too much, too much sweets. But she really enjoys talking, more than I do. I like sounds; I like to make sounds. Maybe I just don't like to think. I belong with people who only grunt and cry. People who make crude marks in the ground. Marks are letters. Letters are words.

I remember those birds cawing that time in the woods. How I felt their cries in my head like marks. I saw their cries like a kind of hieroglyphs. Oh, Mari, Mari, I can't believe we will never make love again.

She says, "I wasn't smoking at all in my country. Just the last

weeks here. I guess I'm nervous. There's so much to do. I feel such a responsibility." She must have heard my thoughts. She's psychic.

"Mari, you know the only time I smoke is when you and I are talking politics. But not when we're talking about poetry."

"It's the true. The True Blue." She offers me a cigarette. I decline. "You seem to feel especially uncomfortable to me talking about the politics, but for me it's naturally. You tease me so much about my English, but notice I have never teased you about your stiffness with the political discussion."

"Probably it's because my mother used to talk nonstop at the dining room table."

"Don't blame it on your mother. It's not necessarily a bad thing. Could be for good reasons. Like the political construct does not interest you so much as the creative one. It's okay to speak the poetry to me. No matter what we are talking about, it feels good. But you made me think something. Let's not spend all of our last times together in coffeeshops. Let's go to some art show next week. And I have a so important film for you to see about Chile."

Her smoke makes my eyes water. Will she think I'm crying? I say, "That sounds great. I haven't seen any shows for a long time."

She finishes the last of her hot chocolate. Then in a mutual motion, we rise, pay the bill and leave the Gold Penny, entering the bustle of traffic on Fifth Avene.

* * *

"What do you think that painting's supposed to show, Mari?"

"It seem a replication of an Indian pictograph—like from a rock painting."

"It could either be one person or Siamese twins joined at the backbone—or two women lovers resting back to back."

"I think the artist wanted it to be all those. See how there's slight differences in the two halves—one person is a little darker than the other, like the shadow of the other."

"And a little heavier. Let's see, where's the title? There it is in calligraphy on the wall. The women who put the show together

really did a job. It's so wonderfully full of life."

"Read to me, Judith?"

"*Chövíohóya—The Power of Twins: We Are All Part of One Another.* That's the Hopi word for both twins and a young deer. Ever notice how feminists seem to need to explain everything."

Mari gives me a wet kiss on my cheek. "So it's supposed to evoke twinness of all of us. See, you can't to keep yourself isolate for that anymore."

"They must be sororal twins but definitely not identical, fraternal or dizygotic."

"I forget sometime you are twin. You never talk about Meredith except in your sleep. I never heard sororal or dizygotic, Judith. Did you make that up?"

"I made up sororal to describe sister twins; we're definitely not fraternal and we're not identical. And dizygotic means a male and female combo. I don't know why, Mari, but I feel like Meredith and I are somewhere between twins and sisters. There's this funny feeling I have that mother kept reinforcing that we were twins—twin brushes and combs, twin purses, twin clothes ad infinitum nauseum—because she was afraid that maybe we weren't twins. We seem more like sisters. It's like parents try to train their boy kids to be tough and their girl kids to be soft, instead of letting the kids be themselves. I mean if mother knew we were twins why did she have to keep asserting our twinship to us and to others? Someday I just know I'm going to find out that we were actually conceived at different times, but we were forced to enter the world at the same time so Mom wouldn't have to make two trips to the hospital."

"So why would you think that?"

"Because I was born a few weeks premature—maybe I really shouldn't have come out on the same day as my sister. They say we were born ten minutes apart, but I was pulled out. I didn't come out willingly."

"I don't know about you, Judith. Seem you always like being between the raindrops. Like in a place you make. So maybe you're right."

"Meredith's and my temperments are so different and our

body parts seem all very unalike."

"Come on, Not-Twin. I want to look at her over there." Mari points to a huge wood carving some distance away: a nude female figure crouches in what looks to be a birthing process; an organic shape is coming out of her vagina. The commanding figure is well-muscled, proud and dignified. Before I can get Mari to look at a case of carved, wooden cups nearby—they look like breasts—she has fled to the big mama figure and is doing a slow-motion sidestep around her.

"Hey, Sweetheart, don't get too excited. This is an art gallery."

"She is so androgynous presence," Mari says, continuing her homage in dance.

"But what she's doing is uniquely female. I wonder why the artist didn't show more human features in the object coming out of her?"

Mari stops to examine the protruding shape. "Maybe to suggest more a creation myth image? Woman as creator of life forms? It is possible."

"Look what the title is: *She Who Amazes!*"

"She who amazes is so Amazonian. She take away my breath, like my Pachamama."

"Now who was Pachamama again?"

"Deity of all agriculture. Is really Pachamma."

"Maybe she's giving birth to a cabbage."

"You're so funny, my Pachamama."

As we continue to make our way around a series of large, organic shaped pots that look both useful and aesthetic, Mari has to stroke each one of them.

"I'm so glad there are no minimalists here," I say. "Remember the show we saw two days ago?"

"You mean that display of sewer pipes and giant beebees? Seem like so luxury to spend all that monies on seeing things you can see everyday and in useful machines."

"That was one person's idea of making us more aware of our reality, I guess, but in a minimalist way. I personally like maximalism like these gorgeous pots."

"I know what you means." She now points to an earthen pot that looks like bag pipes or some kind of blowing instrument. I expect her to start up another respect overture but she stays still. In every tube the artist has placed brilliant colored straw flowers. The patina of the pot reminds me of the subtle earth colors of the Eucalyptus bark.

Now Mari has gone on to examine a wall hanging whose natural tan fibers complement the pots. I notice there are no "NO TOUCHING" signs around. She is taking full advantage of this fact. She seems to be counting the tassels woven in the bottom of the hanging.

"What's the magic number?"

"Look! Seem like our quipu."

"Our key who?"

"Quipu. Quipu. See the knots tied at different points in the cords. And each cord is a different color and size. And look, even of different textures. She must be South Americano artist. Here's the name—Sandra Ruby. Don't sound latino."

"What's a quipu?"

"It's like a so primitive mnemonic device and each different knot, and where its placed and how its made and all the different cords with the different thinness all are the reminders of the facts and events in our oral stories."

"You mean they're like notes a speaker might make before giving a speech?"

"Yes, something like that."

"Can you 'read' what Sandra has written?"

Mari closes her eyes and fingers each strand carefully. I am impressed.

"What is it, Mari? Tell me."

She shakes her head not wanting to be interrupted. It seems like minutes go by. At last she opens her eyes and looks at me seriously. She says, "You are about to meet a fascinating and awesome woman who can tell you secrets only she know about this place."

"But how did you do it, Mari? That's incredible. Show me how to...."

"You *are* about to meet a fascinating and awesome lesbian." A beautiful contralto voice from behind us makes us both turn sharply. "Do you like it?"

A black woman with tight silver curls which mix attractively with ink black ones smiles at us broadly. She's older than Mari or me. "I call it *Dignity*. And see, the story images are woven in the body of the hanging. Those cords are to make a soft frame for the hanging."

I look at Mari bemused; I really believed she was 'reading' them.

"It was my personal story," Mari grins impishly. "But came true already. She is here." Mari puts her arm affectionately around the waist of the woman.

"I'm Sandy Ruby. Pleased to meetcha. What are your names?"

Mari introduces us.

"I've been watching you both have fun with the exhibit. It's nice to see that."

"Oh, I love the show. Everything makes me feel like to jump-rope for happening," Mari says.

"I'm so glad. You should have seen it before *Add In*. We be working night and day on this."

"Addin?" I say.

"The Add—as in math—In," she repeats.

"What's that?" Mari says.

"Last spring, lesbians in the community decided to organize . show in this gallery. The problem being they didn't go out to all the women. They had a clique thing going—the so-called establishment artists, the New York Times Review artists. So work like mine, which didn't fall into your fine arts' categories—painting, sculpture—was left out. There were only a few pieces by third world women. You know, our works of art can be good to look at and helpful around the house, too. Why not? Pots can look like sculptures but hold things and rugs can be dramas. I hung my rug up but its still a rug. My kid just naturally does things like that when he makes things. My son, Tony, really opened my eyes up again to being playful. He makes sculptures that are

musical instruments."

"Oh, you have a son, that's nice. Is he here with you?" I ask.

"He was for awhile, but he took off with his pals to play the video games somewhere in the Village. He's at that restless age, you know, when the hormones are poppin'."

"Lucky you. A teenager," I say, patting her shoulder. "My brother has two young teenage kids and they are a trip. I really identify with their rebelliousness."

"Actually, Tony is mature for his age, if you can call doing break dancing and playing the videos mature. He's only twelve. But he looks older. He's one of those whizz kid types. A gifted child. He always has to be doing something. Takes after his dad, at least his dad when I knew him. The guy just took off and left us; I'm a single parent if you can't tell. But that's another story I'd just as soon not tell."

Mari and I have been nodding non stop while Sandy talks, as if in rhythm to her speech. It almost sounds as if she chants while she speaks—it's so restful to hear.

"What do the pictures mean in your wall hanging, I mean, your rug?" I ask.

She points to the first image at the top of the rug. There is a triangle of black wool followed by a group of black women. The next image shows a woman lifting a basket followed by an image of a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine. Then a woven design of a black bear is followed by a row of black women's heads in profile.

"Can you guess what it says? It's from a poem I love by Barbara Noel Scott called *African Women Walking.* Come on,try to 'read' it."

Mari starts..."Black women lift"...she pauses.

"Let's see," I say. "Black women lift bread and wine."

Sandy mimes the charade gesture meaning *extend.*

"A staff of life," I add. She waves me on.

"Necessity," I say.

"Yes" she says, "necessity."

Mari repeats: "Black women lift necessity...."

"And bear it on their head," I say. I've heard the quote before.

"You got it," Sandy says. "Now say it all. *Black women lift necessity and bear it on their heads.*"

"That say for me so much like a definition of working class of all third world peoples," Mari says.

"Me too," Sandy says.

I ask, "So how did the show get to be so together? You say there was an *Add In*?"

Sandy is eager to talk. "It seemed like once again third world women had to teach these organizers. We had to show them how to make a good show with quality and variety. Let's give them the benefit of the doubt and say their exclusionist policy was unconscious rather than intentional—but at some point you have to take complete responsibility for your actions. So we told them to open the damn show up. In the midst of our dialogue a group of so-called militants, middle class white women, came over to us and said they were going to close the show because it had excluded third world women. We say, 'Hey, Mamas, take a look at us. Ain't we third world women? You're now surrounded by Chicano, Hispanic, Latina, Korean, Native American Indian and we are actively participating in this event from now on. Why don't you ask us what we want instead of telling us? Help us get our works of art hung up or set down and let's get this show on the road!' It took a while for them to see that we were into transforming the situation, not using it to make a revolution for ourselves."

"The politics can get so murky," Mari says. "It's the incredible." She has kept her head cocked, listening so carefully to Sandy's story.

"So where are you all from?" Sandy seems to relax and really look at us for the first time.

Before I can comment Mari says, "The land of the Pampas."

Sandy looks puzzled.

"Argentina," I say.

She laughs. "Oh, I thought you were saying, *pampers.*" But you're so white!"

Mari seems to blush. "There are a lot of white-skinned Europeans that look like so good white middle class in Argentina.

But my family is poor immigrant Italian farm workers and I have Jewish and Indian blood in me too."

"Oh snap. You're a real mix." Sandy's interest perks up.

"It's the same in our culture," Mari offers. "The Indians have kept the beautiful marriage of meaning and design while the European influence, the intellectual, the more middle-class artists, push for the elitism of the fine arts. I know exactly what you mean."

"Ah, so you aren't middle class," Sandy says, as if that fact allows Mari's whiteness. She seems to notice my discomfort with the bent of the conversation. After all, I am white and I come from the middle class; can she tell just by looking at me? "Oh, well," she says, "you can't tell a peach by it's skin or something to that effect," nodding to me warmly. "But you can tell a lot," she adds winking at Mari.

"It's a so complex situation," Mari affirms to both of us.

"Look, if we're going to talk more I feel like a smoke. We've got a separate room for that. Would you two join me if the smoke doesn't bother you?"

"Judith's trying to help me cut down; but I'm still smoking, so I'll join you." Mari is in her element. She loves to smoke and talk politics.

"Sure," I say. "I'll inhale your smoke."

They both look at me to see if I'm being sarcastic or good natured. I assure my good humour with a smile. Sandy leads us to a small separate room in the back with comfortable sofas and a coffee machine. We pour ourselves some coffee and then rest back into the largest sofa.

"It's important to understand that middle class doesn't mean same thing for me as for you here," Mari says.

"Hmm, that's interesting," Sandy says. She takes two cigarettes out of a pack in her blouse pocket and gives one to Mari. They both light up from her match.

"I only begin to understand what middle class and worker class mean in 1946 with the Peronist Movement." Smoke pours out of Mari's nostrils.

"Let's see. You were two years old then, Mari," I say reaching

over to stroke her arm.

Her stern look silences me.

"I meant to say my studies of the 1946 Peronist Movement," she says.

"Yah, I've heard of him," Sandy says. "Didn't he improve the economy by selling meat and grains to Europe and that improved industrialization—something like that. I studied political science in college, twenty-five years ago. I'm not too sharp on all that stuff right now. I know more about community politics and tenants' rights and sex education than about world history, unfortunately." She is careful to blow her smoke away from me.

"That's right. Peoples from all the provinces, poor, peasants, Indians all begin to do factory work," Mari continues enthusiastically. "Cities grew along with a strong urban working class movement. For a while it seem that the working class peoples and the middle class capitalist oriented peoples could to coexist. But it had a weak base. Generally the people wanted to keep their jobs and their homes and not to make the political overtures."

"I can sure relate to that. All of us are afraid to stand up sometimes to risk our jobs and homes. But like here, for my people, we have to stand up to get our jobs and homes!" Sandy says.

"That's a so true reality," Mari says. "After World War II the International Market was run by a Populist group and it came to an end. And this is when your terrible monster country came in. The multinational corporations supported by the United States took over these businesses."

"Oh yes, good old Standard Oil, Texaco, Exxon," Sandy says.

"So Peron wasn't helping the people anymore. His government never had been a conscientious worker political movement. The army came in and put a noose around the working class."

"So did the middle class support the American monopolies over there?" I ask.

"Well, like I say. When you say middle class in Argentina it's

not same as here. The people that work office jobs, techicians with some education and owning some goods were called the *little middle class.*"

"I see what you're driving at," Sandy says. "You've got different kinds of middle classes. Well, we do too. We've got a white middle class and a black middle class and believe me, honey, the privileges are entirely different."

"Right. That's another whole reality," I say.

Mari nods.

"Our *little middle class* have always been more politically aware and active than here," Mari says. "But today it's almost disappeared. The economy is much more black and white."

"You mean polarized, honey," Sandy interrupts.

Mari's momentum doesn't flounder. "Yes, I mean there are the so poor people and the so monied people. The more richer grow the middle class, the more larger the *villas miserias* grow on outskirts of Buenos Aires. You would like to die if you saw these places."

"The villas misery?" Sandy asks.

"You call the shanty towns," Mari says.

"That's like here, Mari. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer," I say. I sound like a cliche.

"So true," Sandy says.

"Someday all the dreams of our working class and little middle class peoples could to become a revolutionary force."

"Right on," Sandy says. "But tell me about you. Are you from the working class, or the little middle class? I love that expression. What was it like for you personally?"

"I grew up during the Peronist period of the little middle class when there was a left radical movement and a large base populist movement. And I was a so lucky person. I got a scholarship sponsor by Peron government to study at the Universidad."

"What did you study?"

"Philosophy."

"Ah, that explains it," Sandy says.

"What?" I ask.

"She has a distant air about her, removed."

Mari looks disturbed.

"Oh, I didn't mean that as a criticism, just an observation. In fact, what I really mean is you're reflective, analytical. I like it." She places a hand on Mari's shoulder. Whatever passes between them encourages Mari to continue.

"My family was the little middle class by then," Mari emphasizes with a gesture of hands showing a small amount. "But at twenty-one I became part of the radical movement, a class of its own. We work to help organize a stronger union with the workers. Unfortunately, this base was being taken over by the Peronist bureaucracy. And then the military also began to handcuff our vision of workers' solidarity. Gradually he was forced out of Argentina in 1955 by the Army."

"So you're a wild-eyed radical too," Sandy says.

"I am a so crazy radical. Sometime it become so...." Mari stops short as if something has caught in her throat.

"What's wrong, Mari?" She is breathing quickly as if not getting enough oxygen.

"You should stop smoking," Sandy says.

"It's not that. I can't to talk."

"Mari can't talk openly, Sandy, about her political situation at home." I probably shouldn't tell her that Mari is on a strict two-month visa. And that her movements are most likely being monitored. "She's on an academic visa to give lectures on poetry"

"We should get some air. We could go to my house to talk," Sandy says.

"It doesn't matter if she's in a house or an art gallery. She is on self-imposed secrecy as well as politically advised silence."

"Was someone in your family killed, Mari?" Sandy reaches over to Mari to comfort her. I wish she would get the hint to not pressure her.

"No—no—it's not that making an oppression in my heart." Mari's breathing is still off.

"Mari, what can we do to help you now? Should I get you some water?" I should get a taxi and take her home.

"It's that so terrible scholarship and my degree in the Philosophy," Mari blurts out.

"But that's so wonderful that you achieved that," Sandy says.

"It's not so wonderful how I've been protected and my compañeras have not."

"Oh, Mari, I didn't know," Sandy says.

"No, I can't talk about it," Mari says.

When, Mari? When were your compañeras tortured I want to ask her. What about you, Mari? When you were in prison two years ago?

"Yes, Judith, you already know," Mari says, looking so deeply into me that I feel nothing could be hidden from her. "You can't ask me what you have needed to ask me because I can't say to you that yes I was tortured. I was not because my identification save me. They begin to separate the degreed people for their own protection from newspaper reportage because Amnesty International was on the trail of the military. They got so many of the young politically aware people. My cell mate was grabbed. I never saw her again. Don't ask me to say anything more. I can't say any more than that." Her body is jerking uncontrollably.

Sandy and I enclose her in our arms.

"Mari, Mari, it's not your fault,' I say. "You are a brave, brave woman. I love you."

"Two months later I heard that she was tortured and murdered. She was true revolutionary worker. Not like me, imposter. And another of my friends, a musician friend with whom I was beginning to play the political folk songs with. She disappear just like that one day. I went to her house and was as if they just grab her while she work to make the dinner. A few months later they find her body in the river floating with the bruises and cuts all over her. Why couldn't to have been me just as her?" Mari is stone-faced, unapproachable.

"But, Mari, you can't feel guilty for what they did. You can feel anger, hate and terror and fear. But you can't feel guilty that it wasn't you. Look what you're going through all the time. Oh, God. I wish you didn't have to live there, Mari. Mari is the most beautiful poet in the world, Sandy. She is telling the world what is happening there." I can't stop the sobs which rise up in me.

Sandy tries to comfort first Mari and then me. The three of us move closer to each other on the sofa as if for protection.

Mari won't, can't talk any more. We sit in silence, our arms about each other's shoulders.

When at last she gives a deep sigh and seems to relax into herself again, Sandy asks her about her family, probably to get her mind off the more troubling subjects.

Mari's voice is soft, deliberate.

"My family is from poor tenant farm people. Even during populist movement they owned no property but they could rent. They get some education too and jobs. My father had some horses he love and could save a little money. They became then little middle class. But now I'm trying to sew together my two worlds, the illiterate poor and the college educated. It makes me feel sometimes like crazy. And so hypocrite."

"You're just a living example of that guy Hegel's dialectics, Mari." Sandy says. "We all have to live with our contradictions. It's just part of life."

"You people are so good listeners," Mari says. Her eyes shine with tears. "You know, the military has been a constant fact in our political life. The rich people seem to create institutions it then need to controls with the army and that's what's happening right now in my country." She looks exhausted to me.

Sandy closes her eyes as if to shut out some of the unbearable reality Mari has shared with us. I close mine as well.

"Mari, my sister," Sandy says. "I think we both have to keep the faith. Believe that the visions of the third world women can work to stop the torture by our oppressors."

"Exactemente." Mari nods.

For the first time in the conversation Sandy looks at me. "What do you think, Judith? You are a beautiful friend for Mari. I can see you have similiar souls."

"I think we all have to be reborn again and again like new in order to be able to see clearly," I say.

The pressure of their hands grasping mine feels good.